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FURTHER PROMOTION AND ENCOURAGEMENT OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND FUNDAMENTAL FREEDOMS,
INCLUDING THE QUESTION OF THE PROGRAMME AND METHODS OF WORK OF THE COMMISSION:
HUMAN RIGHTS, MASS EXODUSES AND DISPLACED PERSONS

Written statement submitted by the International Federation of Action
by Christians for the Abolition of Torture, a non-governmental
organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is
circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV).

[3 March 1998]

Refugees call out to the conscience of the world

1. The world community notes that the number of displaced people is increasing considerably as is that of people fleeing from persecution. On the other hand it is to be observed that host countries are proving to be more and more restrictive when granting refugee status and that displaced groups are victims of persecution and massacres.
2. This situation indicates the responsibility both of States which create or allow the creation of conditions causing the exodus of part of the population, on their own or on foreign territory, and of States which do not provide protection to any person or people taking refuge on their territory.
3. The Commission on Human Rights must therefore, through very firm resolutions, remind countries of the commitments they have made. Fulfilment of these commitments is not optional and shall not depend on current political or economic conditions.
4. In resolution 1997/75 the Commission once again invited "all Governments and regional, intergovernmental and humanitarian organizations concerned to intensify their cooperation and assistance in worldwide efforts to address the serious problems arising from mass exoduses of refugees and displaced persons, and the causes of such exoduses."
5. The International Federation of ACAT (Action by Christians for the Abolition of Torture) deplores the policies pursued by certain States and their refusal to cooperate with intergovernmental or non-governmental organizations. Direct responsibility is held in this sphere by Turkey and Iraq, whose policies have caused a massive exodus of Kurdish peoples. Further examples are provided in Colombia and Mexico, where internal displacements affect a large part of the population whilst the Government is incapable of ensuring their safety and in fact actually contributes to their insecurity. Similarly, in the Congo, many women and men have been displaced. The current authorities, despite their many promises, do not allow them to go back to their places of origin and inflict or allow many threats and acts of brutality to be inflicted upon them. Nonetheless, people displaced within their own country remain outside any international system of protection and assistance.
6. FIACAT therefore asks the Commission to demand that States accept visits by special rapporteurs (or other mechanisms) to areas affected by exoduses so that the silence surrounding such situations can be broken and protection guaranteed as soon as possible.
7. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has noted that the refugee protection system fell within the overall context of human rights, stating that any weakening of the institution of the right of asylum would bring about a weakening of the human rights protection system.
8. Hence, FIACAT calls upon the Commission:
 - (a) To invite host countries to make a liberal interpretation of the Geneva conventions, as suggested by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. European countries' current policy of making it ever more difficult

to apply for refugee status should be declared contrary to the spirit of international conventions. By the same token, the fact that the French authorities only exceptionally accept refugees coming from Algeria is not only an insult to their suffering but also contrary to the spirit of the texts;

(b) To remind, as it did in resolution 1997/75, all countries that it is not legitimate to return a foreigner fleeing persecution to a country where he/she may be under threat of torture or inhuman treatment and that they should, with the help of the international community, not only not put his/her life at risk but also provide him/her with the necessary conditions for a decent existence. The refusal of the authorities of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to allow inquiries to be made about the disappearances of hundreds of thousands of people who had taken refuge on their territory should be condemned and penalized. FIACAT also deplores the forced return to Burundi of refugees from that country staying in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. These events have caused a serious upsurge of violence. On the Rwandan border it appears that the Rwandan armed forces have helped the Burundi army get rid of opponents, which has given rise to massacres and violates all international laws.

9. Leaving one's own country is not a natural reflex. One has to be pushed to it by fear, hunger or repression. International rules protect human beings in especially vulnerable situations. Failure to comply with these rules means condemning entire groups of people. No country can shrug off its responsibility in the face of such inhumane practices.

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